

The Book of Nehemiah

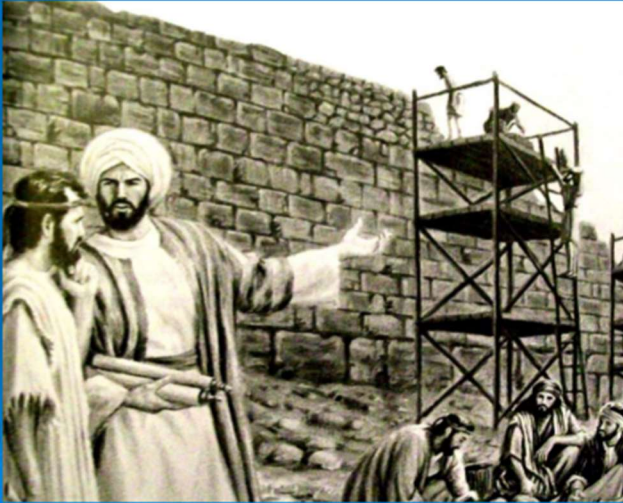
Chapter 6

A Milestone Reached

The Wall Is Built

NEHEMIAH CHAPTER 6: NEW TACTICS OF THE ENEMY

- Chapters 4 & 5 detour away from wall building
- Last vs. of chapter 3 connects with 1st vs. of chapter 6
- Wall was built, but only to half-height, and the gates were still not hung
- Probably around 15 ft.
- Bible narratives often have “main story”, then a pause explains another aspect, and then a return to the main story



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This firsthand information is given to us in the context of the primary enemies of Judah, Sanvallat, Toviyah, and Geshem, having learned that the wall now had no gaps. And we also hear that “other enemies” noticed it as well, so we begin to understand that for reasons unmentioned, Judah was surrounded by enemies who hated them. And that for all these enemies, the reconstruction of the protective walls around Jerusalem was bad news. The bottom line is that the Jews had pulled off the impossible. And they had done it against the strongest political pressure of their enemies, at a time when they weren’t a sovereign nation.

BAD NEWS FOR JUDAH'S ENEMIES

- The enemies lost round 1, but were ready for round 2
- Without Nehemiah's leadership the results would have been failure
- Sanballat offers a meeting
- Purpose certainly was to assassinate Nehemiah
- Ono Valley was a long way from Jerusalem
- Why not meet in Jerusalem if their motives were actually reconciliation?

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Round 2 would see a change of tactics in which the goal would be to render Nehemiah ineffective or perhaps, as I think, dead. Once again pointing up the importance of leadership. The enemies knew that without Nehemiah at the helm, the results would be what they had always been; a zealous start to rebuild followed quickly by disinterest and failure.

The Meeting Request

In verse 2 these enemies propose a meeting between themselves and Nehemiah. They didn't give a reason, but Nehemiah smelled a rat. We know this because of Nehemiah's response. When we follow Nehemiah's story from beginning to end, and we comprehend the inexplicable hatred of the Jews by Arabs and others who lived nearby to Judah and when we believe the Scriptures that show us that this hatred was prophetic and it was spiritual in its source, I find no other reasons than these enemies

fully intended on luring Nehemiah to a meeting and assassinating him.

No doubt Nehemiah figured out their malicious intent if nothing else by the proposed location of the meeting: the Ono Valley. The latest archeological findings seem to point to Ono being in the coastal plain up near Phoenicia. If these enemies were so intent on reconciliation, why not meet in Jerusalem where Nehemiah would feel safe and have a reasonable chance of being protected? After all, who were the aggressors? It certainly had not been Nehemiah and the Jewish people.

They just wanted to build a protective wall and left to live and let live. But even suspecting the evil that was meant against him, the royally trained Nehemiah didn't answer harshly. He merely said that he was too busy working on the wall; he didn't accuse of them of anything. But he did ask the question of why they wanted this meeting when he says in verse 3: "I am busy with an important task, I cannot go down. Why should the work stop to go down to you?" This might sound even a bit sarcastic to us, but it was not. It was simply matter of fact. He's busy, his task is important, and they haven't even given him a purpose for the meeting. But they wouldn't take no for an answer and kept sending him this same message 4 times, and each time he replied in the same way.

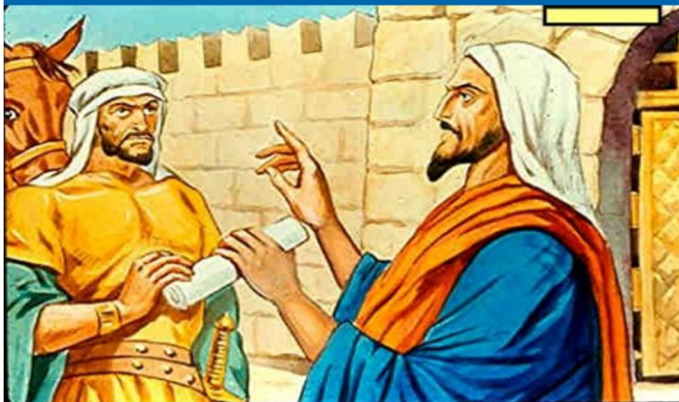
The Open Letter Request

The latest message came in the form of an "open" letter. What exactly that means is unclear. Likely it just means it was unsealed

and all who handled it had the opportunity to read it. When we see that the contents of the letter are false accusations against Nehemiah that he was intending to use the city of Jerusalem as a place to rebel and that he wanted to become the king over Judah, the hope was that this rumor would spread. And once a rumor is widespread enough, it becomes a fact that is hard to overturn.

The message goes on to say that Nehemiah had even appointed prophets to proclaim him king, and so it was Sanvallat's duty to inform King Artaxerxes of these developments. Unless, of course, Nehemiah finally agreed to come to Ono and have a meeting. Once again Sanvallat betrays his true intentions. After all, if Sanvallat actually thought Nehemiah was a rebel, the last thing he'd want is to have a secret meeting with him; it would appear as if they were conspiring together. But, would Artaxerxes believe such a thing about his trusted cupbearer, Nehemiah, even if he was told? It was entirely possible. Nehemiah remained firm. He responded by simply stating that what they accuse him of is false, and that they're just fabricating it in their imaginations.

SAME MESSAGE SENT TO NEHEMIAH 4 TIMES



- Nehemiah responded that he was too busy to come to the meeting
- A new letter with a different message was sent
- The goal was to start a rumor of Jewish rebellion against Artaxerxes
- Sanvallat threatened to tell the King about the accusations unless Nehemiah agreed to a meeting
- Might Artaxerxes believe Sanvallat? It is possible considering all the rebellions that were occurring in the Empire

The False Prophet

Starting in verse 10 we hear of a scheme to try to get a false prophet to convince Nehemiah to commit an act of criminal trespass against the Lord, or to simply flee the area, and thus discredit himself. What must not be missed is that this would attempt to use Nehemiah's own people against him in the plot.

A fellow named Shemaiah is introduced and he makes a suggestion to Nehemiah to meet at the Temple and go inside to hide. There they would lock the doors to protect themselves against the hit men hired by Toviya and Sanballat, with the assumption that even these gentiles wouldn't enter. Nehemiah was not allowed by the Law of Moses to do such a thing. Only priests could enter the interior of the Temple, and Nehemiah was a layman. However it was also a law that a layman could flee to the Temple Altar, hang onto its horns, and be given sanctuary. Be that as it may, the Altar is located outside the Temple, in the courtyard. Therefore while those Jews who were unfamiliar with the Torah (almost everybody in Nehemiah's time) might have seen Shemaiah's suggestion as lawful and logical, Nehemiah knew the Torah and knew he couldn't do such a thing, even if it indeed meant losing his life.

Verse 12 shows how Nehemiah quickly figured out the nature of the plot. Shemaiah was a false prophet hired by the enemy to draw Nehemiah into cowardice and sin. Since Nehemiah knew the Torah, and He knew God's laws, he also knew that God does not contradict Himself. God would NEVER send a true prophet to tell him to violate His sacred commandments. And folks, this is a great lesson and warning to end our session today. If we ever

hear a Pastor, Rabbi, or Christian leader of any sort explain why doing something that we know is against God's laws, is a good thing to do under the circumstances, be skeptical.

SHEMAIAH, THE FALSE PROPHET

- Scare tactics being used to draw Nehemiah away from his mission
- “*..now strengthen my hands..*” is a Hebrew expression and a short impulsive prayer
- Vs.10 *Shemaiah* suggests that he and Nehemiah meet at the Temple and hide inside
- Against the Law of Moses for a layman to go inside the Temple



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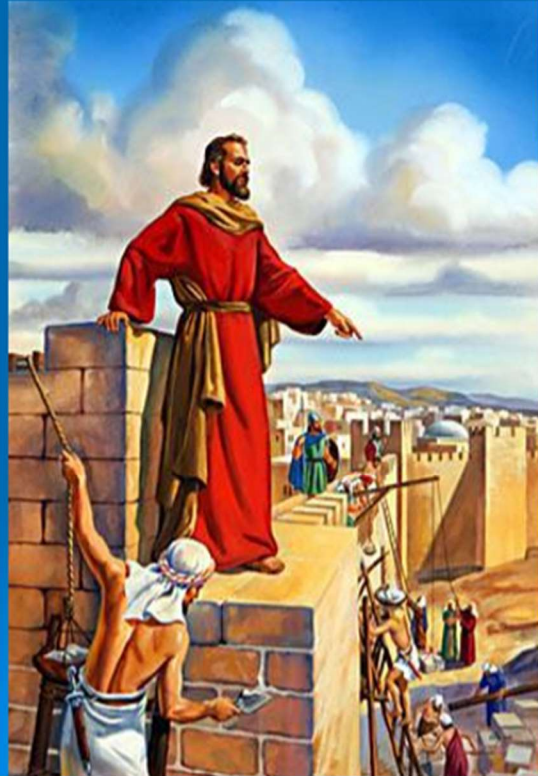
NEHEMIAH WOULD NOT ABANDON SHIP

- Nothing is known of *Shemaiah*
- Nehemiah says that a “man like me” can’t run
- The mark of courageous, good leadership
- Also that a “man like me” can’t hide in the Temple
- The mark of obedience to God’s Torah

52 Days and The Wall is Complete

WALL COMPLETED IN 52 DAYS !!

- It was still at only half-height
- Finished on the 25th of Elul
- Completed in only 6 months from the time Nehemiah was given the OK to build
- Nehemiah deserves credit, but the self-sacrificing workers provide inspiration
- A community-wide, cause-driven effort
- The enemies were depressed and lost self-esteem
- Main concern was that it was the GOD of the Jews who won out over the pagans' gods



This chapter concludes with some important historical information. It is that from the moment that Nehemiah ordered the wall rebuilt and work commenced, it took only 52 days to get the walls re-built to a point where there was a completed protective fence around Jerusalem,

Verse 17 is a sort of additional commentary NOT about what came next, but rather provides us some additional information about the sorts of things that had gone on during this period of wall building that had just concluded. And what we find is that certain unnamed leaders and aristocrats of Judah (Jews) had

been having correspondence with these pagan enemy rulers. Without doubt these Jews acted as informers who kept Toviya and Sanballat well apprised about what was happening behind those walls. And yet, as one would expect to happen, and as we remember the mass divorces that Ezra required of those Jews who had married foreigners, many relationships involving family ties had been created between the Jews of Judah and the gentiles of Samaria and Ammon. Thus we read that Toviya was actually the son in law of a Jew, and Toviya's own son Yochanan had married a Jewish girl. So the Middle East being what it is, those extended family members were generally bound to remain an ally with Toviya even if their personal sympathies might lay with Nehemiah.

INSIDERS WORKING AGAINST NEHEMIAH



- Vs. 17, more info about what happened during the wall building process
- Jewish informers helped Sanballat and Toviya
- Toviya had Jewish relatives
- Toviya manipulated his friends and relatives
- Leaders must see through people who seem OK, but want to subvert and cause division
- A common social dynamic
- Nothing says that Nehemiah was a popular or well-liked leader

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(Content adapted from A Study of Nehemiah by Tom Bradford)